

## 'Sweden's historic "Yes"' from Le Figaro (14 November 1994)

**Caption:** On 14 November 1994, the French daily newspaper Le Figaro comments on the positive result and implications of the referendum held the previous day in Sweden on the country's accession to the European Union.

**Source:** Le Figaro. 14.11.1994, n° 15 625. Paris. "Le oui historique de la Suède", auteur:Validire, Jean-Louis , p. 4.

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**Last updated:** 05/07/2016

## Yesterday's referendum on accession to the European Union

Sweden's historic 'Yes'

The Swedes have decided to open a new chapter in their history. They have turned their backs on a 'model' that has been too expensive and have decided in favour of accession to the European Union.

**Yesterday, a large majority of Swedes voted in favour of their country's accession to the European Union (EU). According to an exit poll of 5 000 people conducted by Swedish national television, 57.6% of the 6.5 million Swedish voters voted 'yes', 41.0% voted 'no', and 1.4% returned a blank ballot paper. The turnout was not yet known, but it should be close to 90% according to polling organisations. Sweden is the third of the four countries applying for accession to the EU to vote in a referendum, following on the heels of Austria and Finland, which have both said 'yes', in June and in October. The Norwegians will go to the polls on 28 November. If the 'yes' is confirmed, the Swedish Parliament will have to rubber stamp the referendum results in December, on a date to be decided.**

If we are to believe the first projections available yesterday evening, the 'yes' campaign has won, and by an appreciable margin. If this result is confirmed, it will constitute a personal success for the Social Democrat Prime Minister, Ingvar Carlsson, an active supporter of the campaign. The victory would be all the more remarkable because all the opinion polls published over the last few days have suggested a much closer outcome. A real political paradox lay behind this 'historic choice'. Employers, the political right, the 'middle-class' parties in power from 1991 to 1994, and farmers, along with union leaders and members of government acting in a personal capacity – the Social Democratic Party and the unions did not officially take part in the campaign – took up the 'yes' campaign with the conviction that it was the final chance to secure the country's future.

On the other side, the 'no' coalition brought together the traditional supporters of the Social Democratic Party, which restored its majority in the Parliament, the Riksdag, last September. That support comes from the social groups that benefit most from the Swedish 'model', in particular women and public-sector employees, who now make up more than 40% of the working population and who fear joining a Union dominated by countries whose policies are diametrically opposed to those of Sweden.

### A mixed coalition

'Europe today is a Europe of a right that we have always resisted,' explained Kenth Pettersson, chairman of the Commercial Workers' Union, one of only a few union leaders to have campaigned openly for a 'no'. 'It is the Europe of Kohl, Berlusconi, Major and, possibly, Balladur tomorrow in France.' The supporters of integration have been able to show that opting for splendid isolation would not allow a 'model' blighted by a rise in unemployment and a budget deficit that will reach SEK 200 billion by the end of the year to be maintained. Finland and Austria have already confirmed their accession to the EU. An alliance of 'rejects', in the condemnatory words of one financier, with Norway, which will probably reject accession, 'would merely be a headlong rush straight into a brick wall.'

If the campaign has been relatively lacklustre, it is because the Swedes rightly want to avoid the 'traumatism' that has dogged their Norwegian neighbours following the 'no' in the 1972 referendum.

Initial results suggest that this is fairly unlikely. Voters have overwhelmingly backed their political

and union leaders despite the recent austerity budget presented by the Government, one which includes tax increases.

It is no longer time to expand the social welfare system. Nevertheless, Sweden is experiencing unemployment affecting 8% of the population directly (compared with 1.5% in 1989) and 14% indirectly, if we include those in training schemes. However, because the country exports 45% of its output, Swedish businesses feel that Sweden must be part of a European economic entity, a feeling shared by farmers, who are looking for markets and subsidies in order to cope with global competition. The dream of an isolated Sweden founded on a successful, but expensive, social model is over. That much was true whatever the outcome of the vote, but it will become even more apparent if the scale of the 'yes' vote is officially confirmed.

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